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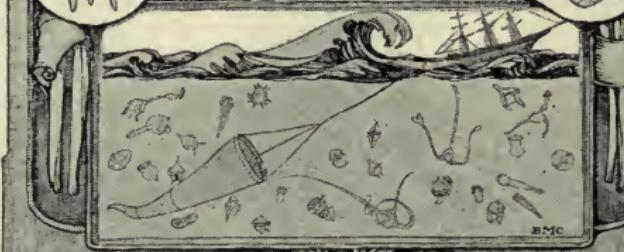
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John S. Chandl

ALCIPHRON.



# A L C I P H R O N,

A Poem.

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BY THOMAS MOORE, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF LALLA ROOKH, ETC., ETC.

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## ALCIPHRON.

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### LETTER I.

FROM ALCIPHRON AT ALEXANDRIA TO CLEON AT ATHENS.

WELL may you wonder at my flight  
From those fair Gardens, in whose bowers  
Lingers whate'er of wise and bright,  
Of Beauty's smile or Wisdom's light,  
Is left to grace this world of ours.  
Well may my comrades, as they roam,  
On evenings sweet as this, inquire  
Why I have left that happy home  
Where all is found that all desire,  
And Time hath wings that never tire;  
Where bliss, in all the countless shapes  
That Fancy's self to bliss hath given,  
Comes clustering round, like road-side grapes  
That woo the traveller's lip, at even;

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Where Wisdom flings not joy away,—  
As Pallas in the stream, they say,  
Once flung her flute,—but smiling owns  
That woman's lip can send forth tones  
Worth all the music of those spheres  
So many dream of, but none hears ;  
Where Virtue's self puts on so well  
    Her sister Pleasure's smile that, loth  
From either nymph apart to dwell,  
    We finish by embracing both.

Yes, such the place of bliss, I own,  
From all whose charms I just have flown :  
And ev'n while thus to thee I write,  
    And by the Nile's dark flood recline,  
Fondly, in thought, I wing my flight  
Back to those groves and gardens bright,  
And often think, by this sweet light,  
    How lovelily they all must shine ;  
Can see that graceful temple throw  
    Down the green slope its lengthen'd shade,  
While, on the marble steps below,  
    There sits some fair Athenian maid,  
Over some favourite volume bending ;  
    And, by her side, a youthful sage  
Holds back the ringlets that, descending,  
    Would else o'ershadow all the page.

But hence such thoughts!—nor let me grieve  
O'er scenes of joy that I but leave,  
As the bird quits awhile its nest  
To come again with livelier zest.

And now to tell thee—what I fear  
Thou'l gravely smile at—*why* I'm here.  
Though through my life's short, sunny dream,  
I've floated without pain or care,  
Like a light leaf, down pleasure's stream,  
Caught in each sparkling eddy there;  
Though never Mirth awaked a strain  
That my heart echoed not again;  
Yet have I felt, when ev'n most gay,  
Sad thoughts—I know not whence or why—  
Suddenly o'er my spirit fly,  
Like clouds, that, ere we've time to say  
“How bright the sky is!” shade the sky.  
Sometimes so vague, so undefin'd  
Were these strange darkenings of my mind—  
While nought but joy around me beam'd  
So causelessly they've come and flown,  
That not of life or earth they seem'd,  
But shadows from some world unknown.  
More oft, however, 'twas the thought  
How soon that scene, with all its play  
Of life and gladness must decay,—

Those lips I prest, the hands I caught—  
Myself,—the crowd that mirth had brought  
Around me,—swept like weeds away.

This thought it was that came to shed  
O'er rapture's hour its worst alloys ;  
And, close as shade with sunshine, wed  
Its sadness with my happiest joys.  
Oh, but for this disheart'ning voice  
Stealing amid our mirth to say  
That all, in which we most rejoice,  
Ere night may be the earth-worm's prey—  
*But for this bitter—only this—*  
Full as the world is brimm'd with bliss,  
And capable as feels my soul  
Of draining to its dregs the whole,  
I should turn earth to heav'n, and be,  
If bliss made Gods, a Deity !

Thou know'st that night—the very last  
That with my Garden friends I pass'd—  
When the School held its feast of mirth  
To celebrate our founder's birth.  
And all that He in dreams but saw  
When he set Pleasure on the throne  
Of this bright world, and wrote her law  
In human hearts, was felt and known—

*Not in unreal dreams, but true,*  
Substantial joy as pulse e'er knew,—  
By hearts and bosoms, that each felt  
*Itself* the realm where Pleasure dwelt.

That night, when all our mirth was o'er,  
The minstrels silent, and the feet  
Of the young maidens heard no more—  
So stilly was the time, so sweet,  
And such a calm came o'er that scene,  
Where life and revel late had been—  
Lone as the quiet of some bay,  
From which the sea hath ebb'd away—  
That still I linger'd, lost in thought,  
Gazing upon the stars of night,  
Sad and intent, as if I sought  
Some mournful secret in their light ;  
And ask'd them, mid that silence, why  
Man, glorious man, alone must die,  
While they, less wonderful than he,  
Shine on through all eternity.

That night—thou haply may'st forget  
Its loveliness—but 'twas a night  
To make earth's meanest slave regret  
Leaving a world so soft and bright.  
On one side, in the dark blue sky,  
Lonely and radiant, was the eye

Of Jove himself, while, on the other,  
'Mong stars that came out one by one,  
The young moon—like the Roman mother  
Among her living jewels—shone.  
“ Oh that from yonder orbs,” I thought,  
“ Pure and eternal as they are,  
There could to earth some power be brought  
Some charm, with their own essence fraught,  
To make man deathless as a star,  
And open to his vast desires  
A course, as boundless and sublime  
As lies before those comet-fires,  
That roam and burn throughout all time !”

While thoughts like these absorb'd my mind,  
That weariness which earthly bliss,  
However sweet, still leaves behind,  
As if to show how earthly 'tis,  
Came lulling o'er me, and I laid  
My limbs at that fair statue's base—  
That miracle, which Art hath made  
Of all the choice of Nature's grace—  
To which so oft I've knelt and sworn,  
That, could a living maid like her  
Unto this wondering world be born,  
I would, myself, turn worshipper.

Sleep came then o'er me,—and I seem'd  
To be transported far away  
To a bleak desert plain, where gleam'd  
One single, melancholy ray,  
Throughout that darkness dimly shed  
From a small taper in the hand  
Of one, who, pale as are the dead,  
Before me took his spectral stand,  
And said, while, awfully a smile  
Came o'er the wanness of his cheek—  
“ Go, and, beside the sacred Nile,  
You'll find th' Eternal Life you seek.”

Soon as he spoke these words, the hue  
Of death upon his features grew—  
Like the pale morning, when o'er night  
She gains the victory—full of light;  
While the small torch he held became  
A glory in his hand, whose flame  
Brighten'd the desert suddenly,  
Ev'n to the far horizon's line—  
Along whose level I could see  
Gardens and groves, that seem'd to shine.  
As if then freshly o'er them played  
A vernal rainbow's rich cascade.  
While music was heard every where,  
Breathing, as 'twere itself the air,

And spirits, on whose wings the hue  
Of heav'n still linger'd, round me flew,  
Till from all sides such splendours broke,  
That with the excess of light, I woke !

Such was my dream ;—and, I confess,  
Though none of all our creedless school  
Hath e'er believ'd, or reverenc'd less  
The fables of the priest-led fool,  
Who tells us of a soul, a mind,  
Separate and pure, within us shrin'd,  
Which is to live—ah hope too bright !—  
For ever in yon fields of light ;—  
Who fondly thinks the guardian eyes  
Of Gods are on him,—as if, blest  
And blooming in their own blue skies,  
Th' eternal Gods were not too wise  
To let weak man disturb their rest !—  
Though thinking of such creeds as thou  
And all our Garden sages think,  
Yet is there something, I allow,  
In dreams like this—a sort of link  
With worlds unseen, which, from the hour  
I first could lisp my thoughts till now,  
Hath master'd me with spell-like power.

And who can tell, as we're combin'd  
Of various atoms,—some refined,

Like those that scintillate and play  
In the fix'd stars,—some, gross as they  
That frown in clouds or sleep in clay,—  
Who can be sure, but 'tis the best  
And brightest atoms of our frame,  
Those most akin to stellar flame,  
That shine out thus, when we're at rest;—  
Ev'n as their kindred stars, whose light  
Comes out but in the silent night.  
Or is it that there lurks, indeed,  
Some truth in Man's prevailing creed,  
And that our Guardians, from on high,  
Come, in that pause from toil and sin,  
To put the senses' curtain by,  
And on the wakeful soul look in !

Vain thought!—but yet, howe'er it be,  
Dreams, more than once, have prov'd to me  
Oracles, truer far than Oak,  
Or Dove, or Tripod ever spoke.  
And 'twas the words—thou'l hear and smile—  
The words that phantom seem'd to speak—  
“ Go, and beside the sacred Nile  
You'll find the Eternal life you seek,—”  
That, haunting me by night, by day,  
At length, as with the unseen hand  
Of Fate itself, urg'd me away  
From Athens to this Holy Land ;

Where, 'mong the secrets, still untaught,  
The myst'ries that, as yet, nor sun  
Nor eye hath reach'd—oh blessed thought!—  
May sleep this everlasting one.

Farewell—when to our Garden friends  
Thou talk'st of the wild dream that sends  
The gayest of their school thus far,  
Wandering beneath Canopus' star,  
Tell them that, wander where he will,  
Or, howsoe'er they now condemn  
His vague and vain pursuit, he still  
Is worthy of the School and them;—  
Still, all their own,—nor e'er forgets,  
Ev'n while his heart and soul pursue  
Th' Eternal Light which never sets,  
The many meteor joys that *do*,  
But seeks them, hails them with delight  
Where'er they meet his longing sight.  
And, if his life must wane away,  
Like other lives, at least the day,  
The hour it lasts shall, like a fire  
With incense fed, in sweets expire.

## LETTER II.

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FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

Memphis.

Tis true, alas—the mysteries and the lore  
came to study on this wondrous shore,  
Are all forgotten in the new delights,  
The strange, wild joys that fill my days and nights.  
Instead of dark, dull oracles that speak  
From subterranean temples, those *I* seek  
Come from the breathing shrines, where Beauty lives,  
And Love, her priest, the soft responses gives.  
Instead of honouring Isis in those rites  
At Coptos held, I hail her, when she lights  
Her first young crescent on the holy stream—  
When wandering youths and maidens watch her beam  
And number o'er the nights she hath to run,  
Ere she again embrace her bridegroom sun.  
While o'er some mystic leaf, that dimly lends  
A clue into past times, the student bends,

And by its glimmering guidance learns to tread  
Back through the shadowy knowledge of the dead,—  
The only skill, alas, *I* yet can claim  
Lies in deciphering some new lov'd-one's name—  
Some gentle missive, hinting time and place,  
In language, soft as Memphian reed can trace.

And where—oh where's the heart that could withstand  
Th' unnumbered witcheries of this sun-born land,  
Where first young Pleasure's banner was unfurl'd,  
And Love hath temples ancient as the world !  
Where mystery, like the veil by Beauty worn,  
Hides but to heighten, shades but to adorn ;  
And that luxurious melancholy, born  
Of passion and of genius, sheds a gloom  
Making joy holy ;—where the bower and tomb  
Stand side by side, and Pleasure learns from Death  
The instant value of each moment's breath.  
Couldst thou but see how like a poet's dream  
This lovely land now looks !—the glorious stream,  
That late, between its banks, was seen to glide  
'Mong shrines and marble cities, on each side  
Glittering like jewels strung along a chain,  
Hath now sent forth its waters, and o'er plain  
And valley, like a giant from his bed  
Rising with out-stretch'd limbs, hath grandly spread.

While far as sight can reach, beneath as clear  
And blue a heav'n as ever bless'd our sphere,  
Gardens, and pillar'd streets, and porphyry domes,  
And high-built temples, fit to be the homes  
Of mighty Gods, and pyramids, whose hour  
Outlasts all time, above the waters tower !

Then, too, the scenes of pomp and joy, that make  
One theatre of this vast, peopled lake,  
Where all that Love, Religion, Commerce gives  
Of life and motion, ever moves and lives.  
Here, up the steps of temples from the wave  
Ascending in procession slow and grave,  
Priests in white garments go, with sacred wands  
And silver cymbals gleaming in their hands ;  
While there, rich barks—fresh from those sunny tracts  
Far off, beyond the sounding cataracts—  
Glide, with their precious lading to the sea,  
Plumes of bright birds, rhinoceros ivory,  
Gems from the isle of Meroe, and those grains  
Of gold, wash'd down by Abyssinian rains.  
Here, where the waters wind into a bay  
Shadowy and cool, some pilgrims, on their way  
To Sais or Bubastus, among beds  
Of lotus flowers, that close above their heads,  
Push their light barks, and there, as in a bower,  
Sing, talk, or sleep away the sultry hour—

Oft dipping in the Nile, when faint with heat,  
That leaf, from which its waters drink most sweet.  
While haply, not far off, beneath a bank  
Of blossoming acacias, many a prank  
Is played in the cool current by a train  
Of laughing nymphs, lovely as she,\* whose chain  
Around two conquerors of the world was cast  
But, for a third too feeble, broke at last.

For oh, believe not them, who dare to brand,  
As poor in charms, the women of this land.  
Though darken'd by that sun, whose spirit flows  
Through every vein, and tinges as it goes,  
'Tis but th' embrowning of the fruit that tells  
How rich within the soul of ripeness dwells,—  
The hue their own dark sanctuaries wear,  
Announcing heav'n in half-caught glimpses there.  
And never yet did tell-tale looks set free  
The secret of young hearts more tenderly.  
Such eyes!—long, shadowy, with that languid fall  
Of the fring'd lids, which may be seen in all  
Who live beneath the sun's too ardent rays—  
Lending such looks as, on their marriage days  
Young maids cast down before a bridegroom's gaze!  
Then for their grace—mark but the nymph-like shapes  
Of the young village girls, when carrying grapes

\* Cleopatra.

From green Anthylla, or light urns of flowers—  
Not our own Sculpture, in her happiest hours,  
E'er imag'd forth, even at the touch of him\*  
Whose touch was life, more luxury of limb !  
Then, canst thou wonder if, mid scenes like these,  
I should forget all graver mysteries,  
All lore but Love's, all secrets but that best  
In heav'n or earth, the art of being blest !

Yet are there times,—though brief, I own, their stay,  
Like summer-clouds that shine themselves away,—  
Moments of gloom, when ev'n these pleasures pall  
Upon my sadd'ning heart, and I recall  
That Garden dream—that promise of a power,  
Oh were there such!—to lengthen out life's hour  
On, on, as through a vista, far away  
Opening before us into endless day !  
And chiefly o'er my spirit did this thought  
Come on that evening—bright as ever brought  
Light's golden farewell to the world—when first  
The eternal pyramids of Memphis burst  
Awfully on my sight—standing sublime  
'Twixt earth and heav'n, the watch-towers of Time,  
From whose lone summit, when his reign hath past  
From earth for ever, he will look his last !

\* Apelles

There hung a calm and solemn sunshine round  
 Those mighty monuments, a hushing sound  
 In the still air that circled them, which stole  
 Like music of past times into my soul.  
 I thought what myriads of the wise and brave  
 And beautiful had sunk into the grave,  
 Since earth first saw these wonders—and I said  
 “Are things eternal only for the Dead ?  
 Is there for Man no hope—but this, which dooms  
 His only lasting trophies to be tombs !  
 But 'tis not so—earth, heaven, all nature shows  
 He *may* become immortal,—*may* unclose  
 The wings within him wrapt, and proudly rise  
 Redeem'd from earth, a creature of the skies !

“ And who can say, among the written spells  
 From Hermes' hand, that, in these shrines and cells  
 Have, from the Flood, lay hid, there may not be  
 Some secret clue to immortality,  
 Some amulet, whose spell can keep life's fire  
 Awake within us, never to expire !  
 'Tis known that, on the Emerald Table,\* hid  
 For ages in yon loftiest pyramid,  
 The Thrice-Great† did himself, engrave, of old,  
 The chymic mystery that gives endless gold.

\* See Notes on the Epicurean.

† The Hermes Trismegistus.

And why may not this mightier secret dwell  
Within the same dark chambers ? who can tell  
But that those kings, who, by the written skill  
Of th' Emerald Table, call'd forth gold at will,  
And quarries upon quarries heap'd and hurl'd,  
To build them domes that might outstand the world—  
Who knows but that the heavenlier art, which shares  
The life of Gods with man, was also theirs—  
That they themselves, triumphant o'er the power  
Of fate and death, are living at this hour ;  
And these, the giant homes they still possess,  
Not tombs, but everlasting palaces,  
Within whose depths, hid from the world above,  
Even now they wander, with the few they love,  
Through subterranean gardens, by a light  
Unknown on earth, which hath nor dawn nor night !  
Else, why those deathless structures ? why the grand  
And hidden halls, that undermine this land ?  
Why else hath none of earth e'er dared to go  
Through the dark windings of that realm below,  
Nor aught from heav'n itself, except the God  
Of Silence, through those endless labyrinths trod ?"

Thus did I dream—wild, wandering dreams, I own,  
But such as haunt me ever, if alone,  
Or in that 'pause 'twixt joy and joy I be,  
Like a ship hush'd between two waves at sea.

Then do these spirit whisperings, like the sound  
Of the Dark Future, come appalling round ;  
Nor can I break the trance that holds me then,  
Till high o'er Pleasure's surge I mount again !

Ev'n now for new adventure, new delight,  
My heart is on the wing—this very night,  
The Temple on that island, half-way o'er  
From Memphis' gardens to the eastern shore,  
Sends up its annual rite\* to her, whose beams  
Bring the sweet time of night-flowers and dreams ;  
The nymph, who dips her urn in silent lakes,  
And turns to silvery dew each drop it takes ;—  
Oh, not our Dian of the North, who chains  
In vestal ice the current of young veins,  
But she who haunts the gay Bubastian† grove,  
And owns she sees, from her bright heav'n above,  
Nothing on earth to match that heav'n but Love.  
Thinks then, what bliss will be abroad to-night !  
Beside, that host of nymphs, who meet the sight  
Day after day, familiar as the sun,  
Coy buds of beauty, yet unbreath'd upon,  
And all the hidden loveliness, that lies,  
Shut up, as are the beams of sleeping eyes,

\* The great Festival of the Moon.

† Bubastis, or Isis, was the Diana of the Egyptian mythology.

Within these twilight shrines—to-night will be,  
Soon as the Moon's white bark in heav'n we see,  
Let loose, like birds, for this festivity !

And mark, 'tis nigh ; already the sun bids  
His evening farewell to the Pyramids,  
As he hath done, age after age, till they  
Alone on earth seem ancient as his ray ;  
While their great shadows, stretching from the light,  
Look like the first colossal steps of Night,  
Stretching across the valley, to invade  
The distant hills of porphyry with their shade.  
Around, as signals of the setting beam,  
Gay, gilded flags on every house-top gleam :  
While, hark !—from all the temples a rich swell  
Of music to the Moon—farewell—farewell.

## LETTER III.

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FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

Memphis.

THERE is some star—or it may be  
That moon we saw so near last night—  
Which comes athwart my destiny  
For ever, with misleading light.  
If for a moment, pure and wise  
And calm I feel, there quick doth fall  
A spark from some disturbing eyes,  
That through my heart, soul, being flies,  
And makes a wildfire of it all.  
I've seen—oh, Cleon, that this earth  
Should e'er have giv'n such beauty birth!—  
That man—but, hold—hear all that pass'd  
Since yester-night, from first to last.

The rising of the Moon, calm, slow,  
And beautiful, as if she came  
Fresh from the Elysian bowers below,  
Was, with a loud and sweet acclaim

Welcom'd from every breezy height,  
Where crowds stood waiting for her light.  
And well might they who view'd the scene

Then lit up all around them, say,  
That never yet had Nature been  
Caught sleeping in a lovelier ray,  
Or rival'd her own noon-tide face,  
With purer show of moonlight grace.

Memphis,—still grand, though not the same  
Unrivall'd Memphis, that could seize  
From ancient Thebes the crown of Fame,  
And wear it bright through centuries—  
Now, in the moonshine, that came down  
Like a last smile upon that crown,  
Memphis, still grand, among her lakes,  
Her pyramids and shrines of fire,  
Rose, like a vision, that half breaks  
On one who, dreaming, still, awakes  
To music from some midnight choir :  
While to the west, where gradual sinks  
In the red sands, from Libya roll'd,  
Some mighty column, or fair sphynx,  
That stood, in kingly courts, of old,  
It seem'd as, mid the pomps that shone  
Thus, gaily round him, Time look'd on,  
Waiting till all, now bright and blest,  
Should fall beneath him like the rest.

No sooner had the setting sun  
Proclaim'd the festal rite begun,  
And, mid their idol's fullest beams,  
    The Egyptian world was all afloat,  
Than I, who live upon these streams,  
    Like a young Nile-bird, turn'd my boat  
To the fair island, on whose shores,  
    Through leafy palms and sycamores,  
Already shone the moving lights  
    Of pilgrims, hastening to the rites.  
While, far around, like ruby sparks  
    Upon the water, lighted barks,  
Of every form and kind—from those  
    That down Syene's cataract shoots,  
To the grand, gilded barge, that rows  
    To sound of tambours and of flutes,  
And wears at night, in words of flame,  
    On the rich prow, its master's name ;—  
All were alive, and made this sea  
    Of cities busy as a hill  
Of summer ants, caught suddenly  
    In the overflowing of a rill.

Landed upon the isle, I soon  
Through marble alleys and small groves  
    Of that mysterious palm she loves,  
Reach'd the fair Temple of the Moon ;

And there—as slowly through the last  
 Dim-lighted vestibule I pass'd—  
 Between the porphyry pillars, twin'd  
     With palm and ivy, I could see  
 A band of youthful maidens wind,  
     In measur'd walk, half dancingly,  
 Round a small shrine, on which was plac'd  
     That bird,\* whose plumes of black and white  
 Wear in their hue, by Nature trac'd,  
     A type of the moon's shadow'd light.

In drapery, like woven snow,  
 These nymphs were clad, and each, below  
 The rounded bosom, loosely wore  
     A dark blue zone, or bandelet,  
 With little silver stars all o'er,  
     As are the skies at midnight, set.  
 While in their tresses, braided through,  
     Sparkled the flower of Egypt's lakes,  
 The silvery lotus, in whose hue  
     As much delight the young Moon takes,  
 As doth the Day-God to behold  
     The lofty bean-flower's buds of gold.  
 And, as they gracefully went round  
     The worshipp'd bird, some to the beat  
 Of castanets, some to the sound  
     Of the shrill sistrum tim'd their feet;

\* The Ibis.

While others, at each step they took,  
A tinkling chain of silver shook.

They seem'd all fair—but there was one  
On whom the light had not yet shone,  
Or shone but partly—so downcast  
She held her brow, as slow she pass'd.  
And yet to me, there seemed to dwell

A charm about that unseen face—  
A something, in the shade that fell

Over that brow's imagin'd grace,  
Which took me more than all the best  
Outshining beauties of the rest.

And her alone my eyes could see,  
Enchain'd by this sweet mystery ;  
And her alone I watch'd, as round  
She glided o'er that marble ground,  
Stirring not more th' unconscious air  
Than if a Spirit had moved there.

Till suddenly, wide open flew.

The Temple's folding gates, and threw  
A splendour from within, a flood  
Of Glory where these maidens stood.

While, with that light,—as if the same  
Rich source gave birth to both, there came  
A swell of harmony, as grand  
As e'er was born of voice and hand,

Filling the gorgeous aisles around  
With that mix'd burst of light and sound.

Then was it, by the flash that blaz'd  
Full o'er her features — oh 'twas then,  
As startlingly her eyes she rais'd,  
But quick let fall their lids again,  
I saw—not Psyche's self, when first  
Upon the threshold of the skies.  
She paus'd, while heaven's glory burst  
Newly upon her downcast eyes,  
Could look more beautiful or blush  
With holier shame than did this maid,  
Whom now I saw, in all that gush  
Of splendour from the aisles, display'd.  
Never—tho' well thou know'st how much  
I've felt the sway of Beauty's star—  
Never did her bright influence touch  
My soul into its depths so far;  
And had that vision linger'd there  
One minute more, I should have flown,  
Forgetful *who* I was and where,  
And, at her feet in worship thrown,  
Proffer'd my soul through life her own.  
  
But, scarcely had that burst of light  
And music broke on ear and sight,

Than up the aisle the bird took wing,  
As if on heavenly mission sent,  
While after him, with graceful spring,  
Like some unearthly creatures, meant  
To live in that mix'd element  
Of light and song, the young maids went ;  
And she, who in my heart had thrown  
A spark to burn for life, was flown.

In vain I tried to follow ;—bands  
Of reverend chanters fill'd the aisle :  
Where'er I sought to pass, their wands  
Motion'd me back, while many a file  
Of sacred nymphs—but ah, not they  
Whom my eyes look'd for—throng'd the way.  
Perplex'd, impatient, mid this crowd  
Of faces, lights—the o'erwhelming cloud  
Of incense round me, and my blood  
Full of its new-born fire,—I stood,  
Nor mov'd, nor breath'd, but when I caught  
A glimpse of some blue, spangled zone,  
Or wreath of lotus, which, I thought,  
Like those she wore at distance shone.

But no, 'twas vain—hour after hour,  
Till my heart's throbbing turn'd to pain,  
And my strain'd eyesight lost its power,  
I sought her thus, but all in vain.

At length, hot,—wilder'd,—in despair,  
I rush'd into the cool night-air,  
And hurrying (though with many a look  
Back to the busy Temple) took  
My way along the moonlight shore,  
And sprung into my boat once more.

There is a Lake, that to the north  
Of Memphis stretches grandly forth,  
Upon whose silent shore the Dead  
Have a proud City of their own,\*  
With shrines and pyramids o'erspread,—  
Where many an ancient kingly head  
Slumbers, immortaliz'd in stone;  
And where, through marble grots beneath,  
The lifeless, rang'd like sacred things,  
Nor wanting aught of life but breath,  
Lie in their painted coverings,  
And on each new successive race,  
That visit their dim haunts below,  
Look with the same unwithering face,  
They wore three thousand years ago.  
There, Silence, thoughtful God, who loves  
The neighbourhood of death, in groves  
Of asphodel lies hid, and weaves  
His hushing spell among the leaves,—

\* Necropolis, or the City of the Dead, to the south of Memphis.

Nor ever noise disturbs the air,  
Save the low, humming, mournful sound  
Of priests, within their shrines, at prayer  
For the fresh Dead entomb'd around.

'Twas tow'rd this place of death—in mood  
Made up of thoughts, half bright, half dark—  
I now across the shining flood  
Unconscious turn'd my light-wing'd bark.  
The form of that young maid, in all  
Its beauty, was before me still ;  
And oft I thought, if thus to call  
Her image to my mind at will,  
If but the memory of that one  
Bright look of hers, for ever gone,  
Was to my heart worth all the rest  
Of woman-kind, beheld, possest—  
What would it be, if wholly mine,  
Within these arms, as in a shrine,  
Hallow'd by Love, I saw her shine,  
An idol, worshipp'd by the light  
Of her own beauties, day and night—  
If 'twas a blessing but to see  
And lose again, what would *this* be ?

In thoughts like these—but often crost  
By darker threads—my mind was lost,

Till, near that City of the Dead,  
Wak'd from my trance, I saw o'erhead—  
As if by some enchanter bid  
    Suddenly from the wave to rise—  
Pyramid over pyramid  
    Tower in succession to the skies ;  
While one, aspiring, as if soon  
    'Twould touch the heavens, rose o'er all ;  
And, on its summit, the white moon  
    Rested, as on a pedestal !

The silence of the lonely tombs  
    And temples round, where nought was heard  
But the high palm-tree's tufted plumes,  
    Shaken, at times, by breeze or bird,  
Form'd a deep contrast to the scene  
    Of revel, where I late had been ;  
To those gay sounds, that still came o'er,  
    Faintly, from many a distant shore,  
And th' unnumber'd lights, that shone  
    Far o'er the flood, from Memphis on  
'To the Moon's Isle and Babylon.

My oars were lifted, and my boat  
    Lay rock'd upon the rippling stream ;  
While my vague thoughts, alike afloat,  
    Drifted through many an idle dream,

With all of which, wild and unfix'd  
As was their aim, that vision mix'd,  
That bright nymph of the Temple—now  
With the same innocence of brow  
She wore within the lighted fane,—  
Now kindling, through each pulse and vein  
With passion of such deep-felt fire  
As Gods might glory to inspire;—  
And now—oh Darkness of the tomb,  
That must eclipse ev'n light like hers !  
Cold, dead, and blackening mid the gloom  
Of those eternal sepulchres.

Scarce had I turn'd my eyes away  
From that dark death-place, at the thought,  
When by the sound of dashing spray  
From a light oar my ear was caught,  
While past me, through the moonlight, sail'd  
A little gilded bark, that bore  
Two female figures, closely veil'd  
And mantled, towards that funeral shore.  
They landed—and the boat again  
Put off across the watery plain.

Shall I confess—to *thee* I may—  
That never yet hath come the chance  
If a new music, a new ray  
From woman's voice, from woman's glance,

Which—let it find me how it might,  
In joy or grief—I did not bless,  
And wander after, as a light  
Leading to undreamt happiness.

And chiefly now, when hopes so vain  
Were stirring in my heart and brain,  
When Fancy had allur'd my soul  
Into a chase, as vague and far  
As would be his, who fix'd his goal  
In the horizon, or some star—

*Any* bewilderment, that brought  
More near to earth my high-flown thought—  
The faintest glimpse of joy, less pure,  
Less high and heavenly, but more sure,  
Came welcome—and was then to me  
What the first flowery isle must be  
To vagrant birds, blown out to sea.

Quick to the shore I urged my bark,  
And, by the bursts of moonlight, shed  
Between the lofty tombs, could mark  
Those figures, as with hasty tread  
They glided on—till in the shade  
Of a small pyramid, which through  
Some boughs of palm its peak display'd,  
They vanish'd instant from my view.

I hurried to the spot—no trace  
Of life was in that lonely place ;  
And, had the creed I hold by taught  
Of other worlds, I might have thought  
Some mocking spirits had from thence  
Come in this guise to cheat my sense.

At length, exploring darkly round  
The Pyramid's smooth sides, I found  
An iron portal,—opening high  
    'Twixt peak and base—and, with a pray'r  
To the bliss-loving moon, whose eye  
    Alone beheld me, sprung in there.  
Downward the narrow stairway led  
Through many a duct obscure and dread,  
    A labyrinth for mystery made,  
With wanderings onward, backward, round,  
    And gathering still, where'er it wound,  
    But deeper density of shade.

Scarce had I ask'd myself “ Can aught  
    That man delights in sojourn here ? ”—  
When, suddenly, far off, I caught  
    A glimpse of light, remote, but clear,—  
Whose welcome glimmer seem'd to pour  
    From some alcove or cell, that ended  
The long, steep, marble corridor,  
    Through which I now, all hope, descended.

Never did Spartan to his bride  
With warier foot at midnight glide,  
It seem'd as echo's self were dead  
In this dark place, so mute my tread,  
Reaching, at length, that light, I saw—

Oh listen to the scene, now raised  
Before my eyes—then guess the awe,  
The still, rapt awe with which I gazed.

'Twas a small chapel, lin'd around  
With the fair, spangling marble, found  
In many a ruin'd shrine that stands  
Half seen above the Libyan sands.  
The walls were richly sculptur'd o'er,  
And character'd with that dark lore  
Of times before the Flood, whose key  
Was lost in th' 'Universal Sea,'—  
While on the roof was pictured bright

The Theban beetle, as he shines,  
When the Nile's mighty flow declines,  
And forth the creature springs to light,  
With life regenerate in his wings :  
Emblem of vain imaginings !  
Of a new world, when this is gone,  
In which the spirit still lives on !

Direct beneath this type, reclin'd  
On a black granite altar, lay

A female form, in crystal shrin'd,  
And looking fresh as if the ray  
Of soul had fled but yesterday,  
While in relief, of silvery hue,  
Graved on the altar's front were seen  
A branch of lotus, brok'n in two,  
As that fair creature's life had been,  
And a small bird that from its spray  
Was winging, like her soul, away.

But brief the glimpse I now could spare  
To the wild, mystic wonders round ;  
For there was yet *one* wonder there,  
That held me as by witchery bound.  
The lamp, that through the chamber shed  
Its vivid beam, was at the head  
Of her who on that altar slept ;  
And near it stood, when first I came,—  
Bending her brow, as if she kept  
Sad watch upon its silent flame—  
A female form, as yet so plac'd  
Between the lamp's strong glow and me,  
That I but saw, in outline trac'd,  
The shadow of her symmetry.  
Yet did my heart—I scarce knew why—  
Ev'n at that shadow'd shape beat high.

Nor long was it, ere full in sight  
The figure turn'd ; and, by the light  
That touch'd her features, as she bent,  
Over the crystal monument,  
I saw 'twas she—the same—the same—

That lately stood before me—bright'ning  
The holy spot, where she but came  
And went again, like summer lightning !

Upon the crystal, o'er the breast  
Of her who took that silent rest,  
There was a cross of silver lying—  
Another type of that blest home,  
Which hope, and pride, and fear of dying  
Build for us in a world to come :—  
This silver cross the maiden rais'd  
To her pure lips ;—then, having gazed  
Some minutes on that tranquil face,  
Sleeping in all death's mournful grace,  
Upward she turn'd her brow serene,  
As if, intent on heaven, those eyes  
Saw then nor roof nor cloud between  
Their own pure orbits and the skies ;  
And, though her lips no motion made,  
And that fix'd look was all her speech,  
I saw that the rapt spirit prayed  
Deeper within than words could reach.

Strange pow'r of Innocence, to turn  
To its own hue whate'er comes near;  
And make even vagrant Passion burn  
With purer warmth within its sphere !  
She who, but one short hour before,  
Had come, like sudden wild-fire, o'er  
My heart and brain,—whom gladly, even  
From that bright Temple, in the face  
Of those proud ministers of heaven,  
I would have borne, in wild embrace,  
And risk'd all punishment, divine  
And human, but to make her mine ;—  
That maid was now before me, thrown  
By fate itself into my arms—  
There standing, beautiful, alone,  
With nought to guard her, but her charms.  
Yet did I—oh did ev'n a breath  
From my parch'd lips, too parch'd to move,  
Disturb a scene where thus, beneath  
Earth's silent covering, Youth and Death  
Held converse through undying love ?  
No—smile and taunt me as thou wilt—  
Though but to gaze thus was delight,  
Yet seem'd it like a wrong, a guilt,  
To win by stealth so pure a sight;  
And rather than a look profane

Should then have met those thoughtful eyes,  
Or voice, or whisper broke the chain  
That link'd her spirit with the skies,  
I would have gladly, in that place,  
From which I watch'd her heav'n-ward face,  
Let my heart break, without one beat  
That could disturb a prayer so sweet.

Gently, as if on every tread,  
My life, my more than life depended,  
Back through the corridor that led  
To this blest scene I now ascended,  
And with slow seeking, and some pain,  
And many a winding tried in vain,  
Emerg'd to upper air again.

The sun had freshly ris'n, and down  
The marble hills of Araby,  
Scatter'd, as from a conqueror's crown,  
His beams into that living sea.  
There seem'd a glory in his light,  
Newly put on—as if for pride  
Of the high homage paid this night  
To his own Isis, his young bride,  
Now fading feminine away  
In her proud Lord's superior ray.

My mind's first impulse was to fly  
At once from this entangling net—  
New scenes to range, new loves to try,  
Or, in mirth, wine, and luxury  
Of every sense, that night forget.  
But vain the effort—spell-bound still,  
I linger'd, without power or will  
To turn my eyes from that dark door,  
Which now enclos'd her 'mong the dead ;  
Oft fancying, through the boughs, that o'er  
The sunny pile their flickering shed,  
'Twas her light form again I saw  
Starting to earth—still pure and bright,  
But wakening, as I hop'd, less awe,  
Thus seen by morning's natural light,  
Than in that strange, dim cell at night.

But no, alas,—she ne'er return'd :  
Nor yet—tho' still I watch—nor yet,  
Though the red sun for hours hath burn'd,  
And now, in his mid course, had met  
The peak of that eternal pile  
He pauses still at noon to bless,  
Standing beneath his downward smile,  
Like a great Spirit, shadowless !  
Nor yet she comes—while here, alone,  
Saunt'ring through this death-peopled place,

Where no heart beats except my own,  
Or 'neath a palm-tree's shelter thrown,  
By turns I watch, and rest, and trace  
These lines, that are to waft to thee  
My last night's wondrous history.

Dost thou remember, in that Isle  
Of our own Sea, where thou and I  
Linger'd so long, so happy a while,  
Till all the summer flowers went by—  
How gay it was when sunset brought  
To the cool Well our favourite maids—  
Some we had won, and some we sought—  
To dance within the fragrant shades,  
And, till the stars went down, attune  
Their Fountain Hymns\* to the young moon ?

That time, too—oh, 'tis like a dream—  
When from Scamander's holy tide  
I sprung, as Genius of the Stream,  
And bore away that blooming bride,  
Who thither came, to yield her charms  
(As Phrygian maids are wont, ere wed)  
Into the cold Scamander's arms,  
But met, and welcom'd mine, instead—

\* These Songs of the Well, as they were called by the ancients, are still common in the Greek isles.

Wondering, as on my neck she fell,  
How river-gods could love so well !  
Who would have thought that he, who rov'd  
    Like the first bees of summer then,  
Rifling each sweet, nor ever lov'd  
    But the free hearts, that lov'd again,  
Readily as the reed replies  
    To the last breath that round it sighs—  
Is the same dreamer who, last night,  
Stood aw'd and breathless at the sight  
    Of one Egyptian girl ; and now  
Wanders among these tombs, with brow  
    Pale, watchful, sad, as tho' he just,  
Himself, had ris'n from out their dust !

Yet, so it is—and the same thirst  
    For something high and pure, above  
This withering world, which, from the first,  
    Made me drink deep of woman's love,—  
As the one joy, to heav'n most near  
    Of all our hearts can meet with here,—  
Still burns me up, still keeps awake  
    A fever nought but death can slake.

Farewell ; whatever may befall,—  
Or bright, or dark—thou'l know it all

## LETTER IV.

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FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

WONDERS on wonders ; sights that lie  
Where never sun gave flow'ret birth ;  
Bright marvels, hid from th' upper sky,  
And myst'ries that are born and die  
Deep in the very heart of earth !—  
All that the ancient Orpheus, led  
By courage that Love only gives,  
Dar'd for a matchless idol, dead,  
I've seen and dar'd for one who lives.

Again the moon was up, and found  
The echoes of my feet still round  
The monuments of this lone place ;—  
Or saw me, if awhile my lid  
Yielded to sleep, stretch'd at the base  
Of that now precious Pyramid,  
In slumber that the gentlest stir,  
The stillest, air-like step of her,  
Whom ev'n in sleep I watch'd, could chase.  
And then, such various forms she seem'd  
To wear before me, as I dream'd !—

Now, like Neïtha, on her throne  
 At Saïs, all reveal'd she shone,  
 With that dread veil thrown off her brow,  
 Which mortal never rais'd till now ;\*  
 Then, quickly chang'd, methought 'twas she  
     Of whom the Memphian boatmen tells  
 Such wondrous tales—fair Rhodope,  
     The subterranean nymph, that dwells  
 Mid sunless gems and glories hid,  
     The Lady of the Pyramid !

At length, from one of these short dreams  
 Starting—as if the subtle beams,  
 Then playing o'er my brow, had brought  
 Some sudden light into my thought—  
 Down for my boat-lamp to the shore,  
     Where still it palely burn'd, I went;  
 Resolv'd that night to try once more  
     The mystery of this monument.

Thus arm'd, I scarce had reach'd the gate,  
     When a loud screaming—like the cry  
 Of some wild creature to its mate—  
     Came startling from the palm-grove nigh ;—

\* See, for the veil of Neitha, the inscription upon her temple, as given by Plutarch, *de Is. et Osir.*

Or, whether haply 'twas the creak  
Of those Lethæan portals,\* said  
To give thus out a mournful shriek,  
When oped at midnight for the dead.  
Whate'er it was, the sound came o'er  
My heart like ice, as through the door  
Of the small Pyramid I went,  
And down the same abrupt descent,  
And through long windings, as before,  
Reach'd the steep marble corridor.

Trembling I stole along—the light  
In the lone chapel still burn'd on ;  
But she, for whom my soul and sight  
Look'd with a thirst so keen, was gone,—  
By some invisible path had fled  
Into that gloom, and leaving the Dead  
To its own solitary rest,  
Of all lone things the loneliest.

As still the cross, which she had kist,  
Was lying on the crystal shrine,  
I took it up, nor could resist  
(Though the dead eyes, I thought, met mine)

\* The brazen portals at Memphis, mentioned by Zoega, called the Gates of Oblivion.

Kissing it too, while, half ashamed  
Of that mute presence, I exclaimed,  
“ Oh Life to Come, if in thy sphere  
Love, Woman’s love, our heav’n could be,  
Who would not ev’n forego it here,  
To taste it there eternally ?”

Hopeless, yet with unwilling pace,  
Leaving the spot, I turn’d to trace  
My pathway back, when, to the right,  
I could perceive, by my lamp’s light,  
That the long corridor which, viewed  
Through distance dim, had seem’d to end  
Abruptly here, still on pursued  
Its sinuous course, with snake-like bend  
Mocking the eye, as down it wound  
Still deeper through that dark profound.

Again, my hopes were rais’d, and fast  
As the dim lamp-light would allow,  
Along that new-found path I past,  
Through countless turns ; descending now  
By narrow ducts, now, up again,  
Mid columns, in whose date the chain  
Of time is lost : and thence along  
Cold halls, in which a sapless throng  
Of Dead stood up, with glassy eye  
Meeting my gaze, as I went by.—

Till, lost among these winding ways,  
Coil'd round and round, like serpents' folds,  
I thought myself in that dim maze  
Down under Mœris' Lake, which holds  
The hidden wealth of the Twelve Kings,  
Safe from all human visitings.

At length, the path clos'd suddenly ;  
And, by my lamp, whose glimmering fell  
Now faint and fainter, I could see

Nought but the mouth of a huge well,  
Gaping athwart my onward track,—  
A reservoir of darkness, black  
As witches' caldrons are, when filled  
With moon-drugs in th' eclipse distill'd.  
Leaning to look if foot might pass  
Down through that chasm, I saw, beneath,

As far as vision could explore,  
The jetty sides all smooth as glass,  
Looking as if just varnish'd o'er  
With that dark pitch the Sea of Death  
Throws out upon its slimy shore.

Doubting awhile ; yet loth to leave  
Aught unexplor'd, the chasm I tried  
With nearer search ; and could perceive  
An iron step that from the side -

Stood dimly out ; while, lower still,  
Another ranged, less visible,  
But aptly plac'd, as if to aid  
Th' adventurous foot, that dar'd the shade.  
Though hardly I could deem that e'er  
Weak woman's foot had ventured there,  
Yet, urged along by the wild heat  
That can do all things but retreat,  
I placed my lamp,—which for such task  
Was aptly shaped, like cap or casque  
To fit the brow,—firm on my head,  
And down into the darkness went ;  
Still finding for my cautious tread  
New foot-hold in that deep descent,  
Which seem'd as tho' 'twould thus descend  
In depth and darkness without end.  
At length, this step-way ceas'd ; in vain  
I sought some hold, that would sustain  
My down-stretch'd foot—the polish'd side,  
Slippery and hard, all help denied :  
Till, as I bow'd my lamp around,  
To let its now faint glimmer fall  
On every side, with joy I found  
Just near me, in the shining wall,  
A window (which had 'scap'd my view  
In that half shadow) and sprung through.

'Twas downward still, but far less rude—  
By stairs that through the live rock wound  
In narrow spiral round and round,  
Whose giddy sweep my foot pursued  
Till, lo, before a gate I stood,  
Which opened, I saw, into the same  
Deep well, from whence but now I came.  
The doors were iron, yet gave way  
Lightly before me, as the spray  
Of a young lime-tree, that receives  
Some wandering bird among its leaves.  
But, soon as I had passed, the din,  
Th' o'erwhelming din, with which again  
They clash'd their folds, and closed me in,  
Was such as seldom sky or main,  
Or heaving earth, or all, when met  
In angriest strife, e'er equalled yet.  
It seem'd as if the ponderous sound  
Was by a thousand echoes hurl'd  
From one to th' other, through the round  
Of this great subterranean world,  
Till, far as from the catacombs  
Of Alexandria to the Tombs  
In ancient Thebes's Valley of Kings,  
Rung its tremendous thunderings.

Yet could not ev'n this rude surprise,  
Which well might move far bolder men,  
One instant turn my charmed eyes  
From the blest scene that hail'd them then.  
As I had rightly deem'd, the place  
Where now I stood was the well's base,  
The bottom of the chasm ; and bright  
Before me, through the massy bars  
Of a huge gate, there came a light  
Soft, warm, and welcome, as the stars  
Of his own South are to the sight  
Of one, who, from his sunny home,  
To the chill North had dar'd to roam.

And oh the scene, now opening through  
Those bars that all but sight denied !—  
A long, fair alley, far as view  
Could reach away, along whose side  
Went, lessening to the end, a row  
Of rich arcades, that, from between  
Their glistening pillars, sent a glow  
Of countless lamps, burning unseen,  
And that still air, as from a spring  
Of hidden light, illumining.  
While—soon as the wild echoes rous'd  
From their deep haunts again were hous'd,—

I heard a strain of holy song  
Breathing from out the bright arcades  
Into that silence—where, among  
The high sweet voices of young maids,  
Which, like the small and heav'n-ward spire  
Of Christian temples, crown'd the choir,  
I fancied, (such the fancy's sway)  
Though never yet my ear had caught  
Sound from her lips—yet, in that lay  
So worthy of her looks, methought  
That maiden's voice I heard, o'er all  
Most high and heavenly,—to my ear  
Sounding distinctly, like the call  
Of a far spirit from its sphere.

But vain the call—that stubborn gate  
Like destiny, all force defied.  
Anxious I look'd around—and, straight,  
An opening to the left descried,  
Which, though like hell's own mouth it seem'd,  
Yet led, as by its course I deem'd,  
Parallel with those lighted ways,  
That 'cross the alley pour'd their blaze.  
Eager I stoop'd, this path to tread,  
When, suddenly, the wall o'er-head  
Grew with a fitful lustre bright,  
Which, settling gradual on the sight

Into clear characters of light,  
These words on its dark ground I read.—

“ You, who would try  
This terrible track,  
To live, or to die,  
But ne'er to look back ;

“ You, who aspire  
To be purified there  
By the terrors of Fire  
And Water and Air ;

“ If danger and pain  
And death you despise—  
On—for again  
Into light you may rise,—

“ Rise into light  
With that Secret Divine  
Now shrouded from sight  
By the Veils of the Shrine !

“ But if ————— ”

The words here dimm'd away,  
Till, lost in darkness, vague and dread,

Their very silence seem'd to say  
Awfuller things than words e'er said.

“ Am I then in the path,” I cried,  
“ To the Great Mystery ? shall I see,  
And touch,—perhaps, ev’n draw aside  
Those venerable veils, which hide  
The secret of Eternity !”

This thought at once reviv’d the zeal,  
The thirst for Egypt’s hidden lore  
Which I had almost ceas’d to feel,  
In the new dreams that won me o’er.  
For now—oh happiness !—it seem’d  
As if *both* hopes before me beam’d—  
As if that spirit-nymph, whose tread  
I trac’d down hither from above,  
To more than one sweet treasure led—  
Lighting me to the fountain-head  
Of Knowledge by the star of Love.

Instant I enter’d—though the ray  
Of my spent lamp was near its last,—  
And quick through many a channel-way,  
Ev’n ruder than the former, pass’d ;  
Till, just as sunk the farewell spark,  
I spied before me, through the dark,

A paly fire, that moment raised,  
Which still as I approached it, blazed  
With stronger light,—till, as I came  
More near, I saw my pathway led  
Between two hedges of live flame,—

Trees all on fire, whose branches shed  
A glow that, without noise or smoke,

Yet strong as from a furnace, broke ;  
While o'er the glaring ground between,  
Where my sole, onward path was seen,  
Hot iron bars, red as with ire,

Transversely lay—such as, they tell,  
Compose that trellis-work of fire,  
Through which the Doom'd look out in hell.

To linger there was to be lost—

More and still more the burning trees  
Clos'd o'er the path ; and as I crost—

With tremour both in heart and knees—  
Fixing my foot where'er a space  
'Twixt the red bars gave resting-place,  
Above me, each quick burning tree,  
Tamarind, Balm of Araby,  
And Egypt's Thorn combined to spread  
A roof of fire above my head.

Yet safe—or with but harmless scorch—  
I trod the flaming ordeal through ;

And promptly seizing, as a torch  
To light me on to dangers new,  
A fallen bough that kindling lay  
Across the path, pursued my way.

Nor went I far before the sound  
Of downward torrents struck my ear;  
And, by my torch's gleam, I found  
That the dark space which yawn'd around,  
Was a wide cavern, far and near  
Fill'd with dark waters, that went by  
Turbid and quick, as if from high  
They late had dash'd down furiously;  
Or, awfuller, had yet that doom  
Before them, in the untried gloom.  
No pass appear'd on either side ;  
And tho' my torch too feebly shone  
To show what scowl'd beyond the tide,  
I saw but *one* way left me—on !  
So, plunging in, with my right hand  
The current's rush I scarce withstood,  
While, in my left, the failing brand  
Shook its last glimmer o'er the flood.  
'Twas a long struggle—oft I thought,  
That, in that whirl of waters caught,  
I must have gone, too weak for strife,  
Down, headlong, at the cataract's will—

Sad fate for one, with heart and life  
And all youth's sunshine round him still !  
But, ere my torch was wholly spent,  
I saw,—cutstretching from the shade  
Into those waters, as if meant  
To lend the drowning struggler aid—  
A slender, double balustrade,  
With snow-white steps between, ascending  
From the grim surface of the stream,  
Far up as eye could reach, and ending  
In darkness there, like a lost dream.  
That glimpse—for 'twas no longer—gave  
New spirit to my strength ; and now,  
With both arms combating the wave,  
I rush'd on blindly, till my brow  
Struck on that railway's lowest stair ;  
When, gathering courage from despair,  
I made one bold and fearful bound,  
And on the step firm footing found.

But short that hope—for, as I flew  
Breathlessly up, the stairway grew  
Tremulous under me, while each  
Frail step, ere scarce my foot could reach  
The frailer yet I next must trust,  
Crumbled behind me into dust ;  
Leaving me, as it crush'd beneath,  
Like shipwreck'd wretch who, in dismay,

Sees but one plank 'twixt him and death,  
And shuddering feels that one give way !  
And still I upward went—with nought  
Beneath me but that depth of shade,  
And the dark flood, from whence I caught  
Each sound the falling fragments made.  
Was it not fearful ?—still more frail  
At every step crash'd the light stair,  
While, as I mounted, ev'n the rail  
That up into that murky air  
Was my sole guide, began to fail !—  
When stretching forth an anxious hand,  
Just as, beneath my tottering stand,  
Steps, railway, all, together went,  
I touch'd a massy iron ring,  
That there--by what kind genius sent  
I know not—in the darkness hung ;  
And grasping it, as drowners cling  
To the last hold, so firm I clung,  
And through the void suspended swung.

Sudden, as if that mighty ring  
Were link'd with all the winds in heav'n,  
And, like the touching of a spring,  
My eager grasp had instant given  
Loose to all blasts that ever spread  
The shore or sea with wrecks and dead—

Around me, gusts, gales, whirlwinds rang  
Tumultuous, and I seem'd to hang  
Amidst an elemental war,

In which wing'd tempests—of all kinds  
And strengths that winter's stormy star

Lights through the Temple of the Winds  
In our own Athens—battled round,  
Deafening me with chaotic sound.

Nor this the worst—for, holding still

With hands unmov'd, though shrinking oft,  
I found myself, at the wild will

Of countless whirlwinds, caught aloft,  
And round and round, with fearful swing,  
Swept, like a stone-shot in a sling !  
Till breathless, mazed, I had begun,—

So ceaselessly I thus was whirled,—  
To think my limbs were chained upon

'That wheel of the Infernal World,  
To turn which, day and night, are blowing

Hot, withering winds that never slumber ;  
And whose sad rounds, still going, going,  
Eternity alone can number !

And yet, ev'n then—while worse than Fear

Hath ever dreamt seem'd hovering near,  
Had voice but ask'd me, "is not this

A price too dear for aught below ?"  
I should have said " for knowledge, yes—  
But for bright, glorious Woman—no."

At last, that whirl, when all my strength  
Had nearly fled, came to an end ;  
And, through that viewless void, at length,  
I felt the still-grasp'd ring descend  
Rapidly with me, till my feet—  
Oh, ne'er was touch of land so sweet  
To the long sea-worn exile—found  
A resting-place on the firm ground.  
At the same instant o'er me broke  
A glimmer through that gloom so chill,—  
Like day-light, when beneath the yoke  
Of tyrant darkness struggling still—  
And by th' imperfect gleam it shed,  
I saw before me a rude bed,  
Where poppies, strew'd upon a heap  
Of wither'd lotus, wooed to sleep.  
Blessing that couch—as I would bless,  
Ay, ev'n the absent tiger's lair,  
For rest in such stark weariness,—  
I crawl'd to it and sunk down there.

How long I slept, or by what means  
Was wasted thence, I cannot say ;  
But, when I woke—oh the bright scenes,  
The glories that around me lay—  
If ever yet a vision shone  
On waking mortal, *this* was one !

But how describe it? vain, as yet,  
While the first dazzle dims my eyes,  
All vain the attempt—I must forget  
The flush, the newness, the surprise,  
The vague bewilderment, that whelms,  
Ev'n now, my every sense and thought,  
Ere I can paint these sunless realms,  
And their hid glories, as I ought.  
While thou, if ev'n but *half* I tell  
Wilt that but *half* believe—farewell!

## LETTER V.

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FROM ORCUS, HIGH PRIEST OF MEMPHIS, TO DECIUS,  
THE PRÆTORIAN PREFECT.

REJOICE, my friend, rejoice :—the youthful Chief  
Of that light Sect which mocks at all belief,  
And, gay and godless, makes the present hour  
Its only heaven, is now within our power.  
Smooth, impious school !—not all the weapons aimed  
At priestly creeds, since first a creed was framed,  
E'er struck so deep as that sly dart they wield,  
The Bacchant's pointed spear in laughing flowers con-  
ceal'd.

And oh, 'twere victory to this heart, as sweet  
As any *thou* canst boast,—ev'n when the feet  
Of thy proud war-steed wade through Christian blood,  
To wrap this scoffer in Faith's blinding hood,  
And bring him, tamed and prostrate, to implore  
The vilest gods ev'n Egypt's saints adore.

What !—do these sages think, to *them* alone  
The key of this world's happiness is known ?

That none but they, who make such proud parade  
Of Pleasure's smiling favours, win the maid,  
Or that Religion keeps no secret place,  
No niche, in her dark fanes, for Love to grace ?  
Fools ?—did they know how keen the zest that's given  
To earthly joy, when seasoned well with heaven ;  
How Piety's grave mask improves the hue  
Of Pleasure's laughing features, half seen through,  
And how the Priest, set aptly within reach  
Of two rich worlds, traffics for bliss with each,  
Would they not, Decius,—thou, whom th' ancient tie  
'Twixt Sword and Altar makes our best ally,—  
Would they not change their creed, their craft, for ours ?  
Leave the gross daylight joys, that, in their bowers,  
Languish with too much sun, like o'er-blown flowers,  
For the veil'd loves, the blisses undisplay'd  
That slily lurk within the Temple's shade ?  
And, 'stead of haunting the trim Garden's school,—  
Where cold Philosophy usurps a rule,  
Like the pale moon's, o'er passion's heaving tide ;  
Where pleasure, cramp'd and chill'd by wisdom's pride,  
Counts her own pulse's regulated play,  
And in dull dreams dissolves her life away,—  
Be taught by *us*, quit shadows for the true,  
Substantial joys we sager Priests pursue,—  
Who, far too wise to theorize on bliss,  
Or pleasure's substance for its shade to miss,  
Preach *other* worlds, but live for only *this* :—

Thanks to the well-paid Mystery round us flung,  
Which, like its type, the golden cloud that hung  
O'er Jupiter's love-couch its shade benign,  
Round human frailty wraps a veil divine.

Still less should they presume, weak wits, that they  
Alone despise the craft of us who pray ;—  
Still less their creedless vanity deceive  
With the fond thought, that we who pray believe.  
Believe !—Apis forbid—forbid it, all  
Ye monster Gods, before whose shrines we fall,—  
Deities, framed in jest, as if to try  
How far gross Man can vulgarize the sky ;  
How far the same low fancy that combines  
Into a drove of brutes yon zodiac's signs,  
And turns that Heaven itself into a place  
Of sainted sin and deified disgrace,  
Can bring Olympus ev'n to shame more deep,  
Stock it with things that earth itself holds cheap.  
Fish, flesh, and fowl, the kitchen's sacred brood,  
Which Egypt keeps for worship, not for food,—  
All, worthy idols of a Faith that sees  
In dogs, cats, owls, and apes, divinities !

Believe !—oh, Decius, thou, who hast no care  
Of things divine, beyond the soldier's share,

Who takes on trust the faith for which he bleeds,  
A good, fierce God to swear by, all he needs,—  
Little canst thou, whose creed around thee hangs  
Loose as thy summer war-cloak, guess the pangs  
Of loathing and self-scorn with which a heart,  
Stubborn as mine is, acts the zealot's part,—  
The deep and dire disgust with which I wade  
Through the foul juggling of this holy trade,—  
This mud profound of mystery, where the feet,  
At every step, sink deeper in deceit.  
Oh! many a time, when, mid the Temple's blaze,  
O'er prostrate fools the sacred cist I raise,  
Did I not keep still proudly in my mind  
The power this priestcraft gives me o'er mankind,—  
A lever, of more might, in skilful hand,  
'To move this world, than Archimede e'er plann'd,—  
I should, in vengeance of the shame I feel  
At my own mockery, crush the slaves that kneel  
Besotted round ; and,—like that kindred breed  
Of reverend, well-drest crocodiles they feed,  
At famed Arsinoë,\*—make my keepers bless,  
With their last throb, my sharp-fang'd Holiness.

Say, *is it to be borne, that scoffers, vain  
Of their own freedom from the altar's chain,*

\* For the trinkets with which the sacred Crocodiles were ornamented, see the Epicurean, chap. 10.

Should mock thus all that thou thy blood hast sold,  
And I my truth, pride, freedom, to uphold ?  
It must not be :—think'st thou that Christian sect,  
Whose followers, quick as broken waves, erect  
Their crests anew and swell into a tide,  
That threats to sweep away our shrines of pride—  
Think'st thou, with all their wondrous spells, ev'n they  
Would triumph thus, had not the constant play  
Of Wit's resistless archery clear'd their way ?—  
That mocking spirit, worst of all the foes,  
Our solemn fraud, our mystic mummery knows,  
Whose wounding flash thus ever 'mong the signs  
Of a fast-falling creed, preclusive shines,  
Threatening such change as do the awful freaks  
Of summer lightning, ere the tempest breaks.

But, to my point,—a youth of this vain school,  
But one, whom Doubt itself hath failed to cool  
Down to that freezing point, where Priests despair  
Of any spark from th' altar catching there,—  
Hath, some nights since,—it was, methinks, the night  
That followed the full moon's great annual rite,—  
Through the dark, winding ducts, that downward stray  
To these earth-hidden temples, track'd his way,  
Just at that hour when, round the Shrine, and me,  
The choir of blooming nymphs thou long'st to see,  
Sing their last night-hymn in the Sanctuary.

The clangour of the marvellous Gate, that stands  
 At the Well's lowest depth,—which none but hands  
 Of new, untaught adventurers, from above,  
 Who know not the safe path, e'er dare to move,—  
 Gave signal that a foot profane was nigh :—  
 'Twas the Greek youth, who, by that morning's sky,  
 Had been observed, curiously wandering round  
 The mighty fanes of our sepulchral ground.

Instant, th' Initiate's Trials were prepared,—  
 The Fire, Air, Water; all that Orpheus dared,  
 That Plato, that the bright-hair'd Samian\* pass'd,  
 With trembling hope, to come to—*what*, at last?  
 Go, ask the dupes of Myst'ry; question him  
 Who, mid terrific sounds and spectres dim,  
 Walks at Eleusis; ask of those, who brave  
 The dazzling miracles of Mithra's Cave,  
 With its seven starry gates; ask all who keep  
 Those terrible night-myst'ries where they weep  
 And howl sad dirges to the answering breeze,  
 O'er their dead Gods, their mortal Deities,—  
 Amphibious, hybrid things, that died as men,  
 Drown'd, hang'd, empaled, to rise, as gods, again;—  
 Ask *them*, what mighty secret lurks below  
 This sev'n-fold mystery—can they tell thee? No;  
 ( Gravely they keep that only secret, well  
 And fairly kept,—that they have none to tell;

\* Pythagoras.

And, duped themselves, console their humbled pride  
By duping thenceforth all mankind beside.

And such th' advance in fraud since Orpheus' time,—  
That earliest master of our craft sublime,—  
So many minor Mysteries, imps of fraud,  
From the great Orphic Egg have wing'd abroad,  
That, still to' uphold our Temple's ancient boast,  
And seem most holy, we must cheat the most;  
Work the best miracles, wrap nonsense round  
In pomp and darkness, till it seems profound;  
Play on the hopes, the terrors of mankind,  
With changeful skill; and make the human mind  
Like our own Sanctuary, where no ray,  
But by the Priest's permission, wins its way,—  
Where, through the gloom as wave our wizard rods,  
Monsters, at will, are conjured into Gods;  
While Reason, like a grave-faced mummy, stands,  
With her arms swathed in hieroglyphic bands.

But chiefly in the skill with which we use  
Man's wildest passions for Religion's views,  
Yoking them to her car like fiery steeds,  
Lies the main art in which our craft succeeds.  
And oh be blest, ye men of yore, whose toil  
Hath, for our use, scoop'd out of Egypt's soil

This hidden Paradise, this mine of fanes,  
Gardens, and palaces, where Pleasure reigns  
In a rich, sunless empire of her own,  
With all earth's luxuries lighting up her throne ;—  
A realm for mystery made, which undermines  
The Nile itself and, 'neath the Twelve Great Shrines  
That keep Initiation's holy rite,  
Spreads its long labyrinths of unearthly light,  
A light that knows no change,—its brooks that run  
Too deep for day, its gardens without sun,  
Where soul and sense, by turns, are charm'd, surprised,  
And all that bard or prophet e'er devised  
For man's Elysium, priests have realized.

Here, at this moment,—all his trials past,  
And heart and nerve unshrinking to the last,—  
The young Initiate roves,—as yet left free  
To wander through this realm of mystery,  
Feeding on such illusions as prepare  
The soul, like mist o'er waterfalls, to wear  
All shapes and hues, at Fancy's varying will,  
Through every shifting aspect, vapour still ;—  
Vague glimpses of the Future, vistas shown,  
By scenic skill, into that world unknown,  
Which saints and sinners claim alike their own ;  
And all those other witching, wildering arts,  
Illusions, terrors, that make human hearts,

Ay, ev'n the wisest and the hardiest, quail  
To *any* goblin throned behind a veil.

Yes,—such the spells shall haunt his eye, his ear,  
Mix with his night-dreams, form his atmosphere ;  
'Till, if our Sage be not tamed down, at length,  
His wit, his wisdom, shorn of all their strength,  
Like Phrygian priests, in honour of the shrine,—  
If he become not absolutely mine,  
Body and soul, and, like the tame decoy  
Which wary hunters of wild doves employ,  
Draw converts also, lure his brother wits  
To the dark cage where his own spirit flits,  
And give us, if not saints, good hypocrites,—  
If I effect not this, then be it said  
The ancient spirit of our craft hath fled,  
Gone with that serpent-god the Cross hath chased  
To hiss its soul out in the Theban waste.

THE END.



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